WHY FONT SENSE?

An Overview of Font Sense Technology

Font Sense is an innovative font identification and activation technology that ensures a smooth workflow by identifying, locating, and activating the exact fonts used in documents. Font Sense goes beyond identifying fonts by name, to creating unique identifiers that guarantee font fidelity. Font Sense is then able to invisibly and automatically activate the correct fonts for any document, greatly enhancing the users' experience and offering promise for automated workflows.

All publishers—from students to art directors to production personnel—strive for the ideal workflow: open a document in any application (on any machine), have the correct fonts activate with it, and then publish the document without error. But, this type of workflow has traditionally encountered two major roadblocks: (1) Fonts can have the same name but, ultimately, be very different; and (2) Applications and basic font managers will look to activate a font based on its name alone. Since different foundries create variations of fonts with the same name, and applications are often unable to determine more than the names of fonts used, getting the font you need activated can be a frustrating ordeal.
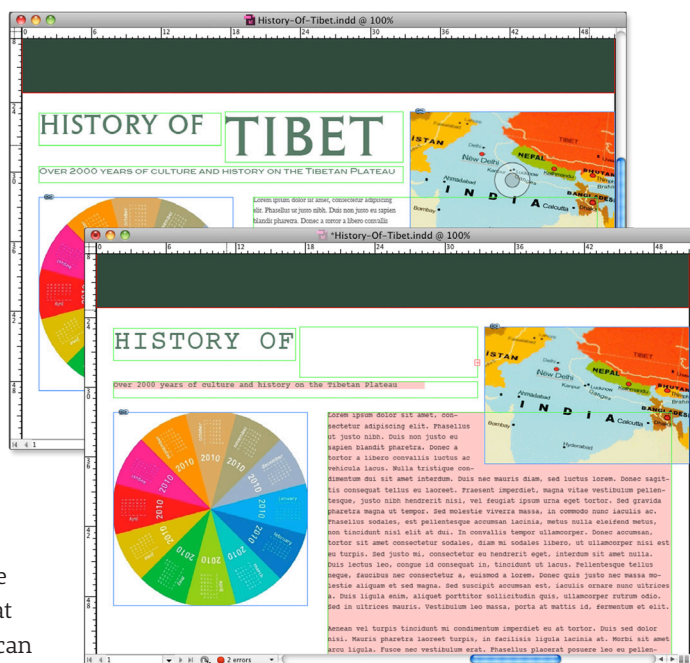
The cornerstone of all font management products from Extensis has always been to take the guesswork out of using fonts. Extensis font managers are equipped with a patented technology called Font Sense, which provides for a deeper level of font identification and matching. While today, a desktop publishing program is recording that a document uses Helvetica—and is then satisfied with any version of Helvetica—with Font Sense technology the document knows exactly which version of Helvetica it needs. Users avoid time-consuming problems and irritating interruptions while maintaining the look of their designs.

The Limitation of Font Names

Using the correct fonts is essential to reproducing a design accurately. No matter how well an application composes type or how skilled the typographer is, if a document is output with the incorrect fonts, the design may be altered or even ruined. Carefully engineered line breaks, text flowing along a path, and logotypes, among other typographic elements, may suffer from different character shapes or spacing within different versions of a font. But with only font names to go by, finding and activating the correct fonts isn't easy. The problem is, as all publishers know, not all Helveticas are created equal.

Consider that a Helvetica from Adobe may have different character widths than a Helvetica from Apple, even if they were originally licensed from the same type foundry. Two Helveticas from Adobe may even be different—and contain different characters. For example an older font would likely not include the necessary Euro symbol that is included in new fonts. If an older font is used as a substitute, text can reflow in unexpected ways, wreaking havoc on both the typography and layout, and incorrect glyphs can appear where new glyphs are expected.

Once the importance of using the correct fonts is recognized, the challenge of actually identifying those fonts remains. Without advanced font matching technology like Font Sense, the only way to know the exact fonts used for a job is to jot down the name, kind, foundry, version, etc. on paper (information which, by the way, is difficult to even obtain without a professional font manager). Adobe® InDesign®, Illustrator®, Photoshop®, InCopy®, QuarkXPress®, and all other applications save only a small bit of information about the fonts used in a document: the font name. Since, as we've seen in our example, one version of Helvetica is not necessarily the same as another, knowing that the document was created with Helvetica is simply not enough information to identify the actual font used to create the document.

Without a method for accurately identifying which fonts were used to create a document, the risk of introducing problems whenever that document is reopened is high—whether for additional editing, for printing, or for any other process. Furthermore, if the required document fonts cannot be accurately identified, completely automated workflows will not be possible because it will never be certain that the fonts activated for a particular job are correct. For this reason, relying on automatic activation of fonts today can be a risky business.

How Does Font Sense Work?

Font Sense works by building a complete font specification—which uniquely identifies the fonts—with documents saved by publishing and design applications. The font specification, a small amount of information that uniquely identifies a font, contains information such as the name, type, foundry, and version number. But for truly unique identification purposes, the font specification also includes a checksum value made up of information about the font's outlines, width tables, and kerning tables.

When you open a document containing a font specification, Font Sense compares this font information to all available fonts, then automatically activates the correct ones. The benefits of Font Sense become greater when coupled with a professional font manager such as Suitcase Fusion™ or Universal Type Server®.

The font specification guarantees that applications identify the correct fonts when opening documents and that the printer uses the correct fonts when printing. This complete font fidelity solves day-to-day problems and expands the possibilities of automated workflows. Automation efforts, halted in the past by font issues, may now move forward, certain that the appropriate fonts can be found in the right place at the right time.

Let's take a look at a typical situation using Universal Type Server:

1. A designer creates a new document using Adobe InDesign, activating the desired fonts for the project using the Universal Type Client.

2. Once complete, the document is handed off to the production team on another workstation.

3. The production team opens the document. The Universal Type Client auto-activation plug-in reads the Font Sense information saved in the InDesign file and automatically activates the exact font required to process the document.

Where Is Font Sense Today?

Font Sense technology is built into all Extensis font management products for both Mac OS® X and Microsoft Windows®, including Suitcase Fusion and Universal Type Server. These products also include free Font Sense-equipped plug-ins and XTensions for leading creative applications, including Adobe Creative Cloud applications such as Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, InCopy as well as QuarkXPress. Whenever a document is saved by any of these applications, Font Sense data is saved with the document. When these documents are reopened at a later time, the Font Sense data precisely identifies the fonts needed by the document. Today, Font Sense is a mature technology, having over a decade of real-world testing behind it. It has proven itself a dependable solution for environments that require consistency and precision when working with fonts.